rewind barney for the eighteenth time

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by stillateenageabomination

Summary

Leonardo continued, "Even though the city knows about you guys, it's in everyone's best interests that we stay unknown. It's easier not to explain four new mutant turtles to the general public."

"They'll think that we cloned ourselves," Donnie mumbled. "Like Dolly the sheep."

"And Sonic," Raph added.

Michelangelo tilted his head. "The hedgehog?"

"No, the *fucking honey badger,"* Raphael scoffed. "Dumbass."

"Your ass is dumb," Michelangelo said, sticking out his tongue. "And flat."

"You motherfucker – "

Leonardo held up a hand. "You two can both be dumbasses once we're back in our dimension, but for now, cool it. We're on a mission. Act like it."

Raphael pulled a face, but they both quieted down. Ooh. Leo would have to steal that trick. Maybe it'd work better than the tears that he usually resorted to when the guys got like this. Not that it worked very well.

Or,

5 times that 2012 Leo was the responsible older brother figure that the mm kids needed + 1 time he was the biggest dork in the multiverse

Notes

- title from mr. mom by lonestar which is,,, so funny to think about in terms of 2012 leo
- the 2012 boys are called by their full names (leonardo, raphael, etc) while the mm kids are called by their nicknames (leo, raph, etc)
- the first section has a brief throwaway line that spoils the s2 amphibia finale so,, you've been warned
- takes place sometime after mm movie, doesn't take place anywhere specific in 2012

timeline
- "abomination what about 'i was just a little bother'" "abomination aren't you writing another 2012/rise fic" "abomination didn't you say that you have like no free time this year" i hear all your questions and i am actively ignoring them thank you

See the end of the work for more notes

1.

Donnie pressed his face against the screen until the frames of his glasses threatened to crack under the pressure. Then he pressed a little harder, ‘cause maybe if he kept at it, the computer would swallow him up whole and he’d have chapter three of his WIP finished in two shakes of Kyo Sohma’s tail.

Sighing, he went to the comments section of the last chapter he’d posted. Maybe he could squeeze enough serotonin from the comments he’d practically memorized by now to motivate him. Come on, *spider-samwilson,* don’t let him down now. Their keysmashes were a godsend in times like this.

He could post the chapter as is. It was long enough to fulfill his self-imposed word count, and by this point the four constant commenters were probably starved for an update. It wouldn’t be a terrible idea. But no, the whole point of this chapter was supposed to set up the epic reveal in chapter six, and if he didn’t start at it now then the pacing would be all off.

Well, it *was* an option to start a new fic…

No, bad author! He made a commitment and goddamnit, by All Might’s luscious locks, he was going to finish it.

His headphones chimed, the tell-tale sign that the power was about to run out, and then Jungkook’s fantabulous vocals cut out. And with that, lives were ruined.

Grumbling underneath his breath, Donnie got up to charge the off-brand Beats Donatello had helped him fix up. The only stipulation the older turtle’d had was that Donnie give polka a chance, which he did. It wasn’t his thing. He didn’t understand how it was anyone’s thing, actually.

He passed Leonardo, scrolling on a shell-shaped phone, as he made a grab for the charger. It was on its last legs, but it’d do. He’d squeezed out more use from older products.

“Everything alright?” Leonardo asked. Donnie was just able to make out the silhouette of a gothy teenager flipping off the camera and then literally flipping off a building before the phone was set down. “You seem upset.”

“Nah, I’m good. Just a little frustrated.”

Donnie always felt a little nervous whenever he was talking with the alternate dimension turtles. He felt really dweebish in comparison, even if he knew that he was leagues cooler than his brothers. It reminded him a lot of when he’d met his cousins, before he’d learned how much they had in common. They were just automatically more interesting than him, a guy who’d spent his whole life interacting with the same four not-people.

So if his words were a little clipped, then sue him. He’d watched enough Ace Attorney playthroughs to know his way around a courthouse.

“Anything I can help with?”

Donnie hesitated. He’d told his Discord server full of friends from school about his fic, and they’d thought it was really cool. Teased the hell out of him for his ship of choice, yeah, but that was to be expected. He’d do the same in their shoes.

His brothers, though, he hadn’t breathed a word to them about his recent status as an actually published Ao3 writer. Mostly because he would rather lay down his life on a cold winter day than have his family look through his bookmarked fics. What lurked in his history tab was between him and Nunya Bidnes, thank you very much.

Leonardo, though, was – how did Donnie put this nicely? Even lamer than Donnie, if that was a possibility. He had this quiet politeness to him that his brothers seemed to easily use to their advantage whenever the mood struck. It was honestly kind of sad at this point. So Donnie doubted that, if push came to shove, he’d give him that much of a hard time over writing a Naruto/Genshin crossover fic in 2023.

Shell, Donnie was cringe sometimes. That was fine, though. Life was cringe and people were cringe and everything was cringe and then everyone died! Nihilism was fun like that.

“I’m running into some issues with a fic I’ve been working on,” he said. He spied a strawberry kiwi Capri-Sun someone had left lying around, as usual. Ooh, well, if it was already there, he would say no. “My friend CJ said that they’d beta-read it, but they’ve been busy with their driver’s ed classes, so we haven’t really been able to talk shop, you know?”

Leonardo hummed, nodding. “Oh yeah, I get it. What problems are you having? More grammar, sentence structure stuff, or plot troubles?”

Donnie ruthlessly impaled his juice pouch like King Andrias spearing Marcy Wu in the best season finale to ever grace the silver screen. “Bit of both? I can’t move onto the next section ‘cause I keep worrying that I’ll have to rewrite everything as soon as I hear back from CJ. Plus I know what I need to set up for the upcoming chapters, but I don't know how to.”

He winced. “Double-whammy, huh?”

“Tell me about it.”

“If you want, I could give it a look? I’ve never been able to breach the 1k kudos benchmark, but I know my way around Ao3.” Leonardo got a far-off, distant look to his eyes. “I should warn you, though, that I spent most of my time in the trenches of fanfiction-dot-net.”

Donnie clutched his chest. “Thank you for your service.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“But yeah, that’d be awesome! You’d be down?”

“Yeah, of course. Anything to help the next gen.” Leonardo worried his lip. “Take it from someone who spent an ungodly amount of time on Quotev back in the day – you have options the likes of which 2010s-era tumblr teens would have dreamed of.”

Donnie was already racing towards his laptop. “On god!”

2.

History was cool. History was cool. History had, like, fighting. Wars. Revolutions and shit. Raph liked fighting and wars and revolutions, if leading the resistance against Lame-o-nardo counted. History wasn’t opposed to Raph’s interests. He could write an essay on the Industrial Revolution. He could. He was smart, though not as smart as Donnie, or Donatello, because goddamn that guy might just be a cyborg if all the loose gears falling out of his pockets were any sign.

Raph wasn’t stupid. People might see him as a meathead ‘cause he preferred to deal with his problems with his fists rather than his brain, but he wasn’t an idiot. Idiots couldn’t write history essays. Raph could.

He just – didn’t want to.

It was more than that, more than just a quiet distaste for sitting still long enough to put pen to paper. He couldn’t get the swirly thoughts in his head to condense into useful information. It was like trying to catch a bar of soap; not impossible, but pretty damn difficult. Right now, he knew that his alternate self was totally going to town on those punching bags they’d dragged from the dump, which was infinitely more fun than writing a stupid paper.

Raph loved violence. It was so cool! Cooler than history, easily. He loved the way his muscles burned as he pushed himself farther and farther, past any point he’d crossed before. His fists cleanly slicing through the air. His steady heartbeat growing louder. It was a rush that he never, ever tired from. Fighting made him feel alive.

He was up and out of his chair before he realized it. Damnit. He hadn’t even started his thesis, he couldn’t justify more procrastination at this point. Maybe once he was finished analyzing his evidence, though at that point he might as well finish the stupid thing.

Raph threw himself back down at his desk and picked up his pencil. Then he put down the pencil. Sharpened it. Put it down again. Grabbed a pen instead. Scribbled something in the margins. Realized the thing was out of ink. Looked around for the grocery list. Found it. Tried to write down *pens,* but paused when nothing happened. Picked up the pencil. Added to the list. Put the pencil down again.

His paper remained on the desk, blank as his head.

It was too much to ask that it’d write itself while he pummeled Donnie, wasn’t it?

He threw his head back and groaned, the back of the chair digging into a bandaged section of his shell. Why had he ever thought that school was something to look forward to? Tomorrow, when fourth period came, he’d have nothing to show for the two weeks Mr. Fenwick had given them all at the beginning of the semester. School sucked. History sucked. Everything sucked, especially the sucky Industrial Revolution. Stupid metal.

Someone knocked on the wall behind him. Raph turned to see the weird, somehow minutely less cringey Leonardo stick his head through the doorframe. “Oh, hey, buddy. Why aren’t you kicking shell with Raph?”

He crossed his arms, pouting. “I gotta work on a history paper.”

“Oh. That – sucks.”

“Right! Why should I have to write about a dumb revolution that my teacher already knows about when I can be polishing off my left hook?”

He rubbed the back of his neck and winced. “Good question. I never went to school, so I don’t really know why they make you write essays. They’re like DIY textbooks.” He crossed the room, easily stepping over a pyramid of Pepsi cans like it was second nature. Leonardo leaned on the desk and peered over at the notes Raph’d jotted down in class. Well, maybe most of them were Leo’s notes, but still. It wasn’t like they were very useful. Nardo always doodled for most of the period anyway. “Doesn’t look like much essay-writing is happening.”

“If you’re so perfect why don’t you write it for me,” he scoffed. Typical. Just ‘cause he didn’t write at the speed of light like Mikey or listen to enough historical musicals to get by in class like Donnie, he was the slow one. Again. Slow and stupid, with more muscles than brain cells.

Leonardo huffed a laugh. “I couldn’t do that if I tried. This is for APUSH, right?”

He miserably nodded.

“Yeah, I only really know Japanese history, and most of that is centered around ninjas anyway.” He blushed a bit, one hand absently fluttering by his side as he spoke. “I was really into that stuff a few years back. April probably checked out a dozen books every month with how quickly I went through them.”

It was weird to see a Leo who didn’t run his hands along his mask tails, kicking his feet like someone on Little House on the Prairie whenever he mentioned April. Maybe this guy had enough street smarts to know that being delulu in this economy was a death sentence.

“‘s just the Industrial Revolution. Manufacturing and weapons and shit. Not much to know about it.”

“Weapons? Like what?”

One pen in each hand, Raph drummed out a little beat against his desk. “Well, a lot of people only talk about the dumb inventions at the time, like the Spinning Jenny, but there was tons of other stuff that came from the revolution later on! Oppenheimer core, you know?”

Leonardo nodded along, scribbling down chicken scratch letters on a scratch sheet of paper as Raph spoke. “Ooh, really? That’s interesting. Tell me more.”

Smiling, Raph told him all about the different effects the Industrial Revolution’d had on each of the World Wars. Trench warfare versus blitzkrieg had caught his interest in class, even if

his teacher had only offhandedly mentioned it. Oh, and the musket, and the machine gun, and the pipe bomb! Pipe bombs were awesome!

He showed Leonardo one of the art pieces they'd had to dissect in class. Most of the kids had focused on the nature or whatever shown, but Raph hadn't been able to tear his eyes off of the crossbows and rifles alike that had been pictured. Imagine seeing a sixteenth century piece about brass knuckles, that'd be insane!

He didn't realize how long he'd been talking until Leonardo reached for another piece of paper. The sheet he'd been writing on was full, lines and lines of letters stacked on one another. Raph caught odd words, like *gunpowder* and *hydrogen.* All the stuff he'd been yammering on about.

"Were you – taking notes?"

"Yeah!" He slid the paper Raph's way. "I tried to get down the gist of what you said. I don't know what the prompt for your paper is, but if you can just write down all that you told me, I think that you're off to a great start at the very least."

Raph blinked. Looked at Leonardo. Blinked again. "How the shell did you get me to blab about history so much?" He hadn't even known that he had this much to say about anything that happened before the Jonas Brothers debuted. Jeez, he was a fucking fountain of information!

Leonardo got to his feet. He gave Raph a pat on the shoulder, the same way Dad did when he was especially proud. It was nice. "Bud, you're *really* hyperfixated on martial arts and weaponry. Once I got you focused on that aspect of history, you didn't need much encouragement."

Huh. "You made history interesting," he said distantly, feeling a bit of an out of body experience. Not in a bad way, though. It was just weird.

He laughed again. "Take it from me, whose special interest of almost a decade now has been a low-budget cartoon from the Cold War – don't fight the autism. Work with it if you can. You like history, you just need help in remembering what part it is you like."

And with that, he disappeared behind the corner like an neurodivergent genie vanishing after a third wish was granted.

Raph blinked again. Dang. Leo was weirdly leaderlike in every universe, wasn't he? That was – fun to know, he supposed.

He turned to his paper, notes in hand, and got to writing. Maybe he'd get extra credit if he added visual aids of the pointiest blades of all time.

3.

Leo took a deep breath. Then another. And another. And another, until he realized that, at some point, his breaths had become decidedly less deep. They were shallow, harsh things that sliced his throat open with each passing moment. It hurt to breathe, but he knew that it'd hurt way more not to.

He made to jump onto the next rooftop, but his knee buckled right before he could spring into the air. He plummeted, just barely grasping the edge of an outstretched windowsill before he went splat against the concrete below.

Damnit.

He pulled himself back onto the roof, and gave himself a generous five seconds to freak the fuck out. Then he kept moving, pumping his legs faster, as if an extra boost of speed would be the thing to save tonight from being an absolute hell-in-a-handbasket disaster.

They were probably dead. Dead, dead, dead. Dead as the man on the final steps, because there was no way that someone could fall down *that* many stairs and hit his head at *that* angle and bleed *that* much blood without yeeting himself off this mortal coil they called life.

Leo wondered if he was a murderer. He wondered if it even mattered, because if his brothers were dead, well, then there wasn't really a point to anything at all.

Where could they be? In a ditch. In the bottom of the sea. In a grave. In the park, 'cause it was movie night and maybe they'd heaved their bruised bodies across Brooklyn just to catch the last few minutes of Legally Blonde out of pure spite and a desire to give Leo an aneurysm. Again.

They were little shits, all three of them, but Leo would be damned if anything happened to them. He'd also be damned if they found out how much cursing he did when they weren't around to hear it. He hadn't put a quarter in the swear jar since April Fools Day of 2018, and it would stay that way until his dying breath.

Maybe his brothers had breathed their dying breath.

Shit, shit, shit.

He threw himself onto the fire escape of a nearby building. He gripped the ladder rungs so hard that he was sure his hands were bleached white. This wasn't okay. It wasn't okay. It wasn't okay, and nothing would ever be okay because his brothers were *dead dead dead* –

"Leo?"

His fingers slipped. He nearly fell off of the ladder, only hooking his feet around the sides just in time. He blinked at the figure on the ground growing steadily closer. The neon lights from the Kohl's across the street made everything look garish in the middle of the night, which was dumb. All of this – All of this was dumb. Dumb as a box of thumbs.

"Bud? You alright there? You look like you saw a ghost," Leonardo called up at him. He had both of his swords in their sheathes against his shell. Good. That was good. Maybe if he had

his weapons, he wouldn't die the way that Leo's brothers probably certainly definitely died. "You guys don't have ghosts here, do you? 'Cause in another dimension, there was a Mikey and an April that were very insistent on something called the Gumbus – "

He loosened his grip. In one smooth but oh so jerky movement, Leo dropped to the ground. The impact of asphalt against sneakered soles made his knees ache, but it didn't matter. There were only five things in the world that matter, and three of them had shells and were missing.

Leonardo's eyes were wide. "Jeez! Take it easy, pulling shit like that will give you, I dunno, arthritis – "

"Are they okay?" Leo croaked. He felt a hundred years old, yet as useless as the toddler that Dad had brought to the surface a decade ago. "Raph and Donnie and Mikey. Where are they?"

Are they dead? he didn't say, because that was too easy to answer *yes* to.

Leonardo gave him a weird look, like Leo'd pulled out a flower lei and sombrero and started to floss his way over to the Hobby Lobby on the other block. "Yeah? I mean, I saw them at the lair probably fifteen minutes ago. They looked pretty shaken up. Said that you got thrown through a window or something. Are you okay?"

Fifteen minutes ago. That was more than enough time to bleed out if the wounds were severe enough. He could get back home in seven minutes, five if he booked it while the subway ran instead of waiting between stops.

Heart rattling in his chest, Leo turned to head home, but Leonardo snatched his wrist. He clocked the other turtle in the beak with his free hand before he even realized he'd committed to the motion.

"Youch! Okay, I deserved that one. I know better to grab a guy in the middle of a panic attack." Leonardo winced. "But, uh, I think you need to sit down. You look like you're about to pass out."

"Raph," Leo repeated. "Donnie. Mikey. I need to make sure they're okay." He needed to make sure they were alive.

"Why wouldn't they be?"

Because they carried weapons that could just as easily slice through their skin as their enemies'. Because Superfly had popped their shells like bubble wrap in half a minute flat. Because Leo wasn't with them, and anything could be happening.

"We ran into TCRI," he rasped, because that was always where it began, wasn't it? The opening sequence, the final title card, they all depended on those four letters determining the fate of those four brothers. "Got separated. Said we'd rendezvous, but we couldn't say where before we were split up. I need – "

He doubled over, caught in the midst of a wheezing gasp. Shell, he couldn't breathe. He couldn't *breathe.* He was blue ink splashed over a green Post-It and he could be crumpled and tossed into the trash before he could get a word out. He was crumbling infrastructure propped up by three weights that had vanished into nothingness when last he turned his back. He was fading like a ghost, because he'd allowed his brothers to become ghosts, because he hadn't been careful enough, because because because.

He wondered if dying became easier since he'd veered so close to it so many times. Maybe it was like an infection, like chicken pox.

"Hey! Easy there. Here, take a seat." Leonardo gently tugged him into sitting criss-cross applesauce in the middle of the alley, which was just gross on so many levels. Leo was pretty sure that Raph'd ralphed here last week after attempting a double backflip with a stomach full of pizza and Ben & Jerry's. "You need to take deep breaths, okay? Or else you're gonna pass out."

"They're dead," he wheezed. "The guys. They're – I swear they're – "

Leonardo kneeled down next to him until they were both face-to-face with one another. Leo couldn't help but meet his eyes. They were calm as always. How could they be so calm when Leo, the raging storm, was right besides him?

"Your brothers are okay," he said slowly, but firmly. "They're at the lair. They're fine. I promise."

"N-No! They're – "

Without looking away, Leonardo took out his phone and dialed a number. It rang for a few seconds before someone picked it up.

"Yellow?"

"Mikey," Leonardo said, but it wasn't Mikey. It was Michelangelo, who could never be Mikey, not in a million years, just like Raph could never be Raphael and the Donnies could never be each other because they were dead. "Can you put the minis on the phone?"

"Uh, yeah? Sure, lemme just… Ayo! Fun-sized me! Leo wants to talk to you."

"Leo?"

Leo let out a breath he hadn't known he was capable of holding. His Mikey, his brother from the day they'd shown up in a Manhattan sewer, was okay. "Hey, man."

"Where are you? Raph said to meet at the lair – Did those government guys get you? Are you okay?"

"I'm…" He met Leonardo's eyes again. Watched as the older turtle purposefully took a deep breath in, then released it slowly. Copied the motion once, then twice, then a third time. "I'm alright. A lot happened back there, I didn't know where you were. Donnie and Raph are with you, yeah?"

"Yep. We all got home at around the same time. Are you almost back?"

"I'll be there. I promise."

Leo hung up. Then he burst into tears.

He was a loud crier. When they were little, Raph always had crocodile tears for days, these massive bouts of waterworks that would go on until Dad took him aside and made him a mug of hot chocolate. Mikey sort of froze when everything got too much, like his mind was jumping around too fast for him to realize what was going on. Donnie cried quietly, and it always freaked Leo out to wonder how often his tears went unnoticed.

Leo himself fell victim to gasping, uncontrollable sobs. His chest grew tight. Every awful thought he'd ever had multiplied before his eyes. He held his arms tightly enough that bruises were sure to appear in a few hours' time. He practically fell apart into nothingness in the blink of an eye.

Leonardo scooped him into a hug without another word.

Why was he crying? The guys were okay. Everything was okay now. They weren't dead. They were home. There was no reason to be sad, or scared, or anxious. He'd gotten a happy ending. So why wasn't he happy?

"Scared of the what-ifs?" Leonardo said quietly. Leo's arms, looped around the other turtle's shell, tightened. He nodded. "I get that. I – I wish there was something I could say to make it better. But I've never found the words to help that feeling before."

Leo sighed. He closed his eyes.

"The best I can do is take you home and show you for yourself that your family is okay. How does that sound?"

That – sounded great, actually. Seeing for himself that his brothers were alive, if a little beaten up? That'd help, even if it wouldn't vanish the hollow, crackling feeling in his chest.

He nodded again, and Leonardo stood up. He pulled him into a piggyback-hold, and made for home.

4.

Mikey growled, and resisted the urge to rage-quit freaking Unravel Two of all games. If he'd conquered Minecraft and Papa's Pizzeria, then he could beat this stupid murder shadow turkey thing. This was the last time he listened to Leatherhead's recommendations, though. This game was not the stress-relieving break from Intro to Theatre he'd been promised.

He took a deep breath, tightened his grip on the controller, and restarted the level. *Swing, jump, sprint, swing, swing, swing!* Damnit. He got caught on an overhanging tree branch, and it was lights out for him.

Mikey slumped against the coach. Ugh, this game was so rigged.

Behind him, he heard footsteps as someone passed through the room. They stopped abruptly. “Is that a turkey?” Leonardo said slowly.

Mikey sighed. “Yeah.”

“Why?”

“That’s a great question.” He loved this game but whatever the plot was, he had *not* been following it. There was probably a joke to make out there with plot threads and weaving, but he wasn’t paid enough to think of it. Times was tough.

Leonardo hurtled over the back of the couch. “Well, now I’m intrigued.”

“Don’t be,” Mikey huffed. “This is a game of anguish and sorrow. It is a trial that only the accursed are doomed to undertake.”

“All I’m getting is pixie dust and zen music.”

“That’s a trap.”

Leonardo picked up the other controller that Mikey’d left on the coffee table, next to his Geometry homework. Whoops. He gave it a quick once over, then settled back against the cushions. “Is this a two-player game?”

“Yeah.”

“Show me how to play?”

Huh. Okay. Mikey wasn’t quite sure where exactly this was going, but he was down to go with it. Maybe Leonardo would be a prodigy at this Satan-borne game from hell.

He explained the controls, and what little he understood of the plot that might not exist. For all he knew, the very premise of this game functioned solely on vibes, which was a mood. It was just like him, for real for real.

He was at a save point, so he took Leonardo back to one of the easier levels to get him used to overcoming the obstacles. Leonardo was a quick learner, but Mikey got the feeling that the trait wasn’t exclusive to video games. Once they played through a few levels, Leonardo told him to go back to where he’d been stuck before.

“You do improv, right?” Leonardo asked before Mikey began the level. Unlike most of the chill, slow-paced obstacles the game usually threw at him, this was a fast dash to the finish line before the fucking shadow turkey consumed him. Because of course it was.

“Yeah, I do!”

Mikey loved improv. Most of the time, he got in trouble for blurting out whatever came to mind, but improv was like an exception to the rules! The other kids told him that his

suggestions were *creative* and *unpredictable.* Mikey liked hearing those words. They reminded him of pop rocks, crackly and sizzling.

“Do you have any ideas for your next, uh, skit?” Leonardo said, and pressed play. His character burst forward, and Mikey rushed to keep up with him.

“Huh? Oh yeah, kind of! I mean, most of improv relies on not planning…” Mikey trailed off as he mashed the jump button down, only to mistime the leap and send his avatar plummeting into the shadows. “Darn!”

“Hey, don’t worry about that. We can try again,” he said. “What was your last skit about?”

“Wasp witches!”

“Oh.”

Mikey’s little Yarny flung out a red strand, hooking on Leonardo’s avatar. “My friend Sunny’s really into Halloween, so she’s had demons and stuff on the brain all month! And Baxter loves bugs and always tries to shoehorn them in whenever he can, so we finally let him give it a go.”

Just a half-second too slow, the shadows caught up to Mikey’s avatar. They gobbled up his little buddy with an ironic gobble-gobble.

“How’d that go?”

“Really good, actually.”

Absorbed by the shadows again.

“That’s great! Were you, like, a witch too?”

“Oh no, I was a wasp. Nita was the witch, obvi, and she was controlling me and the other bugs.”

“Ah, of course.”

Leonardo’s avatar swung Mikey’s across the chasm. Then, on a stable tree branch, Mikey held fast and let Leonardo follow him. Once the two were on even ground, they sprinted forward.

“I was like, *‘That’s so rad, buzz buzz. Help us with the aphid air raid, buzz buzz!’* and then Baxter was like – ”

He cut himself off right as the avatars made it over the finish line, and the shadows faded into thin wisps. He did it. The level he’d been grinding away on for the better part of two hours. He finally got it done. Damn.

Mikey glanced at Leonardo, who smirked as he set down his controller. “On god, did you gaslight me into getting good?”

Leonardo blinked. “I feel so old whenever words come out of your mouth.”

“So does Dad. He said he’d uninstall the WiFi if we called him a boomer again.” Mikey thought that if he did that, Donnie might simply astral project towards the next plane of existence on the spot. He leaned forward, one possibly nonexistant ear listening out for the music change that told him he was on a new level. “How did you do that?”

He shrugged. “My brain gets loud when I mess up. I thought that yours might too. It seemed like a good idea to get you to focus on something else so that you couldn’t psych yourself out, and I guess that it was.”

Well. That was smart, and probably one of those leader-y things that Leo was always trying to cook up.

Leonardo picked up the controller again. “I like this game, and I really liked hearing about your improv stuff. Wanna try another level?”

Mikey grinned. “Yeah!”

And so the paradox that was Unravel Two claimed another still-innocent soul.

5.

April O’Neil was a w-r-i-t-e-r. A writer. And a two-time Douglass Elementary School Spelling Bee winner, not that she was bragging. ‘Cause it wasn’t bragging if it was cold, hard facts. That’s what Mama said, and everything Mama said was the plain old truth, so nothing Mama said was bragging. It was interesting how things worked out that way.

English was always April’s favorite class, or at least it would be until she was old enough to join Journalism 101. She was counting down the days until Mrs. Jones let her into the editing room.

Whenever a teacher handed out a rubric and a prompt, ruthlessly pushing past the miserable gazes of the vast majority of students in the room, April sat up straighter and sharpened her pencils. Writing was in her blood. Daddy wrote for his high school newspaper, and so did Gramps for *The World,* and so did Auntie Jo for Buzzfeed. It was as varied as a bag of trail mix, yeah, but red pen and the inverted triangle were as much a part of her culture as Uncle Henry’s mac and cheese was.

So it was weird beyond belief that, for the first time in all her life, April was dealing with writer’s block.

Maybe it was the vagueness behind the assignment, or maybe she was just having a bad day. No matter what the reason was, the problem remained, and the problem would continue to remain unless she tackled it head-on.

What unites different people?

An interesting prompt from her English teacher, and one that her classmates definitely weren't spending as much time fretting over as she was. Sometimes, she hated that she never let herself just phone it in on an assignment. Why couldn't she make it one day without putting a hundred and ten percent of herself into her work? It'd sure be easier that way.

But no. Like Mama said, the harder it was to do it, the better it was that you did it. Then again, she mostly brought up that piece of advice whenever it was April's turn to wash the dishes, so she'd take it with a grain of salt.

Notebook tucked underneath her arm, April marched over to the other, older Leonardo. He was sharpening a set of blades with one of Splinter's whetstones. Where the old rat had gotten his hands on the family's various weaponry over the years, April would never know.

She sat down across the table from him, slapping down her notebook with a sharp crack. Life was about making an emphasis. In order to become the amazing reporter she knew she could be one day, she'd need to *be* an emphasis, in body and soul.

"Can I interview you?" she asked.

Leonardo set down a handful of blades on top of the table. They were placed in neat rows, each half an inch apart from the other. Observance was an important trait to develop for those working to uncover the truth. April had spent years honing that skill in, and she was sure that she'd spend years more perfecting it.

"Sure. About what?"

"You're a leader," she began. If she knew anything about any Leo ever, it was that they had the leader's spirit deep in their bones. "You know all sorts of things about uniting people, right? Tell me about that. Tell me about what it's like to be a leader."

He shifted in his seat. "It's difficult. Not very rewarding a lot of the time. I don't think that a lot of people are capable of doing what's necessary to be the leader. It's an extremely important job, but like I said – it's difficult."

"How do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Complete the difficult job. How do you do something that you yourself admit to be difficult and still get up to do it again tomorrow?"

He huffed out a bark of laughter. "That's a great question. You're a great reporter."

"Thanks," she said dryly.

"Let me ask you a question." He leaned forward, and April had to force herself not to do the same. "How do *you* do it? How do you pick up your pencil and put yourself out there?"

April kept her mouth shut. She was good at asking questions. It was something she could do for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. But answering questions she wasn't prepared

for made her feel vulnerable in a way that nothing else did. It was unfamiliar territory. All of a sudden, she was on her lonesome, all by herself. It was scary.

But April had stopped a mutant manhunt with nothing but her voice and some Ibuprofen. She was a badass, and she did scary things every day. This was nothing.

“I’m good at it. I’m good at finding a good story, and I’m good at telling it to other people.” She wasn’t bragging. She was telling the truth. “How could I not report news when I know how great I am at it?”

“I get that,” Leonardo said. “That’s me with leading. I haven’t always been good at it. It’s taken a lot to get where I am today, and I still have a ton to improve on. But leading my team is my best shot at protecting my family, so if I’m even halfway decent at it, that’s what I’m going to do.”

April scribbled something down on a blank sheet of paper. “Huh. That’s – That’s something that I haven’t considered before. Thanks, man. I appreciate this.”

“Did it help whatever you’re trying to write?”

“Oh no, not at all,” she laughed. She scooped up her stuff and began walking away, because this was a great set-up for a dope exit. “This wasn’t anywhere close to my homework topic. But it’s good life advice. Food for thought, you know? Props to you for that.”

And with that, she walked off, absently clicking her pen. What an interesting guy. Definitely a character that she’d want to check in on in the future.

+1

Leo knew that he wasn’t the best leader. Missions, if they could even be called that, usually boiled down to him taking the fall if anything went wrong while simultaneously being ignored by the guys in favor of whatever bright, sparkling thing caught their eyes that night. He didn’t have the drive or the grit that Leonardo seemed to naturally exude as he led the eight of them through the city.

Well, technically nine, but April was Ubering to the rendezvous point because she said that she’d probably dislocate her shoulder if she swung across the rooftops Spider-man-style like them. Smart girl. Smart, beautiful girl…

The older Donatello had discovered that there’d be an influx of energy at an old TCRI power plant at midnight tonight. His voice had been all hushed when he’d told his brothers this, but Leo and his family were very, very good eavesdroppers. They’d insisted on coming with, and now here they were; en route to the Bronx at 11:30 on a school night. How were the guys not freaking out? They had a Bio quiz tomorrow!

Leo made the mistake of mentioning this anxiety once – literally only *one* time – and now his brothers kept pointing out the time every five minutes. They were jerks, all of them, and jerks with bad time-management skills on top of that.

About a block from the power plant, Leonardo stopped on the edge of a rooftop and held up a closed fist. Although they rolled their eyes at him, Raphael, Donatello, and Michelangelo slowed down to stand beside him. They did so quickly, which made Leo and his brothers look like absolute chumps when they bumped into each other, skidding across the roof with an ear splitting *screech.*

Raphael snorted at them. Jerk.

Shoulders squared, Leonardo pointed at a bank across the street. “Be careful. I spotted four cameras on each cardinal side. When it comes to places like this, for every camera you can see, there’s three that you can’t.”

Wow. Should Leo be writing this down? April probably would.

“We can go around to save being spotted,” he continued, “but it’ll take an extra three minutes, and we’re already cutting it pretty close to the time deadline. Even though the city knows about you guys, it’s in everyone’s best interests that we stay unknown. It’s easier not to explain four new mutant turtles to the general public.”

“They’ll think that we cloned ourselves,” Donnie mumbled. “Like Dolly the sheep.”

“And Sonic,” Raph added.

Michelangelo tilted his head. “The hedgehog?”

“No, the *fucking honey badger,”* Raphael scoffed. “Dumbass.”

“Your ass is dumb,” Michelangelo said, sticking out his tongue. “And flat.”

“You motherfucker – ”

Leonardo held up a hand. “You two can both be dumbasses once we’re back in our dimension, but for now, cool it. We’re on a mission. Act like it.”

Raphael pulled a face, but they both quieted down. Ooh. Leo would have to steal that trick. Maybe it’d work better than the tears that he usually resorted to when the guys got like this. Not that it worked very well.

Leonardo turned back toward the street. “Like I was saying, we can also choose to go through here. It’ll be the most direct route. We’ll need to stick to the shadows in order to pull it off, though. It’ll be tough, but we’re all trained ninjas. We just need to – ”

He cut himself off. His eyes went as wide as dinner plates. The tense position he’d coiled himself into became tenser.

Then he hurled himself off of the roof.

“What the shell?” Mikey screamed. Leo winced. Jeez, his brother was loud. In a heartbeat, he was plastered on Leo’s side, as if he was next. “Is he okay?”

Fists already balled, Raphael inched closer to the edge, peering over. He scanned the area below them. A smirk cut across his face, and he laughed. “Of fucking course.”

“What are you – ” Donatello began, but stopped as he too looked down. “Oh. Yeah. That tracks.” He turned toward Leo and his brothers. “Leo’s alright, just… Well.”

“Being Leo,” Michelangelo filled in, and hopped off the rooftop as well.

Donatello swung his legs over the edge. “Don’t worry, there’s a balcony to catch yourselves on.”

Leo exchanged a side-eyed glance with Donnie. Had he missed something? Had a serious lore drop gone on while he was back on Clairemont Street, booking it from that family of raccoons? Donnie shrugged. Raph, next to him, grinned. He looked almost too happy to launch himself over the edge of the roof.

His brother was many things, and an adrenaline junkie was clearly one of them. Leo wondered how mad he’d be if he shoved him off the roof next time he called him *Nardo.*

A hop, skip, and a jump brought Leo to ground level. A quick survey brought him eyes on Leonardo, who was pressed against the window of a new shop that had opened recently. Oh. April had posted about this place on her story the other day. She’d reposted a pretty scathing article on the awful carbon footprint it was leaving behind with every sale. He was surprised that no one was around. As far as he knew, people had been protesting the new story almost twenty-four seven since it opened.

“Uh, are you alright, man?” Raph called out. “You look like Donnie when the I NEED U music video came out.”

Donnie fell to his knees in remembrance, a single tear falling down his face.

Leo sighed and pulled him back onto his feet before he realized that he was kneeling on a moldy Twinkie. Damn, this city was nasty sometimes.

Leonardo whirled around, eyes as bright as that one Sailor Moon character Donnie had once declared that he would go to war for. “You guys have *Space Heroes here?”*

He blinked. “Is that the Walmart Great Value knockoff of Star Wars?”

Leonardo pulled a face. *“No.* Star Wars *wishes* it had the fourteen seasons of pure awesomeness that Space Heroes has.” His hands fluttered by his sides as he turned to look back inside the store.

“Doesn’t it have, like, over a dozen tv show spinoffs?” Mikey wondered aloud.

“Is that a Captain Ryan Funko Pop? Holy shit!”

“The Mandalorian, the Bad Batch, that Obi-Wan show…”

“Oh my shell, and a board game? What is that, Monopoly?”

“The one with Ahsoka, the one *about* Ahsoka…”

“Can I own Mercury?”

“The Book of Boba Fett, Andor, I think there was a Phineas & Ferb crossover at some point…”

Leonardo rocked back and forward on his heels. “Holy. Holy shit. Holy motherfucking bitching dicking *shitballs.”*

Michelangelo threw his head back and cackled. “This is the best fucking day of my life!”

“Don’t swear in front of the babies,” Leonardo mumbled, not tearing his eyes away from the spectacle before him.

Michelangelo made a sound like an impaled walrus. Raphael laughed harder at that.

Leo, himself, felt like Dad was going to pop out of the shadows at any moment with a bar of soap and a month-long grounding. Sometimes, his father was *in the walls.*

“Donnie, look!” Leonardo dragged his brother over to the rightmost window, bouncing from one foot to the other. “It’s Dr. Mindstrong’s Martian Manual! From season eight!”

Donatello smiled, revealing a gap in his teeth. “That’s great, Leo.”

All of a sudden, Leonardo’s mouth snapped shut. He paled until he was looking sort of like the mint ice cream Raphael had brought them all yesterday. He brought Donatello closer, until his brother's face was smooshed against his. “Donnie, I think I died.”

“Why did you die, Leo?”

“‘Cause that’s a VHS of Cap: A Space Heroes Origin Story. Donnie. *Donnie.* That’s the made for tv movie that was canceled by the network under mysterious circumstances. *Donnie.”*

“That’s very nice, Leo. But hey, aren’t you forgetting something?”

Leo watched the other version of himself blink at Donatello. For a moment, he didn’t say a thing. Then a lightbulb in his head visibly went off, and he yelped, “Oh! Yeah. Getting home. That thing.”

“That thing, yeah,” he said, and squeezed his brother back.

“Are you gonna buy the damn thing, Lame-O-Nardo,” Raphael barked, “or are you just gonna keep drooling over it?”

Leo sighed again. Welp. There went another nickname that his brothers would inevitably call them. He wondered if it was worth it to try testing out Raph-Fail, but that would probably make him the butt of the joke more so than Raph himself.

Donnie peered through the door. Leo followed him, eyeing the high-priced baubles and ornamentals. “The sign says that it doesn’t open until seven.”

It was true. There, in the back, was a huge whiteboard studded with LEDs on the sides. It read, *Mon-Sat: 7:00 am - 8:00 pm.* It’d been closed for almost four hours now.

Leonardo deflated. “Oh,” he said quietly. He took a step backwards, then another, and another. He blinked quickly. “Well. That’s okay. Uh, we should – We should go now. Yeah.”

Raphael rolled his eyes. “Don’t be a fucking martyr. We’re gonna get your damn movie.”

“No, it’s fine. We shouldn’t put returning home at risk just for – ”

“We’re gonna get your damn movie,” he repeated, louder, “whether you like it or not.”

Raphael was an interesting guy, Leo was realizing. He had a protective streak to him, sort of like Superfly. Just without the, well, human bigotry. Hopefully. Unless Raphael had hate-crimed April without anyone else knowing.

“Maybe you guys have a store like this in your world,” Mikey said.

“Isn’t it some sort of mom-and-pop shop?”

Leo found himself shaking his head. “No, it’s a chain store led by some billionaire. Amazon Fresh for hipsters, basically.”

Raphael stepped toward him. Grabbed his shoulders. Lowered himself until they were at eye-level. “Are you saying that Jeff Bezos owns this store.”

“Elon Musk, I think.”

“Fucking awesome,” he said, and then promptly rammed his fist through the glass pane.

Leo could have sworn that his soul evaporated like milk in that very moment. He could have been struck down by lightning, right then and there, and he wouldn’t have been the wiser for it. Was this what it felt like to reach spiritual enlightenment?

“What the shell, Raph?” someone shrieked. Leo wasn’t quite sure who, ‘cause he possibly probably was having a seizure at that very moment.

Shrill, ear-piercing alarms sounded off as Raphael dove through the hole in the window he’d made. Legs flailing, he rummaged around the crime scene of his own making until he withdrew with a triumphant yell. “Got it!” He shoved it into Leonardo’s hands and cheerily grinned at him. Then he booked it the fuck away.

“Raph!” Leonardo hissed, but a quick glance between Michelangelo and Donatello later, he was being pulled along by his brothers, the two of them running so fast that Leo could see him stumble to keep up.

Leo stared at the shattered glass. Then he stared at his brothers. Then he stared up at the shrinking dot that was the alternate turtles. Then he stared at his brothers again. They stared back at him.

Well.

That. Happened.

“Leonardo’s a nerd,” he said, distantly hearing a soft, *“Damn right!”*

“And a dork,” Donnie said.

“Possibly a geek,” Mikey added.

Raph bounded up to him and flicked his forehead. “Just like you, Lame-O-Nardo!” And then he was off, chasing after the others, Mikey and Donnie not far behind.

“Better catch up quick!” Mikey shouted at him. “We have a Bio quiz in eight hours!”

He felt his cheeks flush red. “Oh, come on!”

Bonus, from a dimension away:

Leonardo sat up, practically tumbling off of the coach. In a flash, he was just a few inches away from the television. He blinked, uncomprehending. He couldn’t believe what his eyes were seeing.

“Holy shell. They canceled this movie because *Captain Ryan and Crankshaw make out?”*

End Notes

- if you liked this, i have a completed 2012/rise multichapter fic posted! i'm also currently finishing up another 2012/rise oneshot
- i have tons of mm crossover fic ideas, with both 2012 and rise. i'll probably make a series to categorize them since they'll all be pretty short oneshots
- for those of you who know me from my other fics, expect slow posting until november at the earliest, may at the most likely. this could have taken me three days during the summer but it took around four weeks during the school year. yay.
- 2012 leo is. so autistic. guys. he's the autism ever. i hc mm leo to be autistic and mm raph to be audhd. mm donnie and mm mikey are so neurodivergent too i'm just not sure what exactly i think that they are so they aren't tagged. but rest assured - every tmnt character is neurodivergent. trust me nicolas cantu told me

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!